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Immediate Release

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## **Environment Department Takes Action to Protect Socorro Drinking Water from Tire Fire Contamination**

(Santa Fe, NM) — The New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) Secretary Ron Curry has directed that emergency response activities be conducted at the Southwest Tire Processors, Inc. facility in Socorro. These activities will include the drilling of three groundwater monitoring wells to determine whether groundwater has been contaminated as the result of a large tire fire at the facility.

“Tire fires have serious environmental impacts and toxic legacies,” said Secretary Curry. “Because a municipal drinking water well is located within one-half mile of this facility, this action is necessary to ensure that this well remains safe.”

On June 21, 2000, a scrap tire storage pile at the Southwest Tire Processors facility caught fire. The fire burned at the surface for several days. The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) responded to the fire. Despite efforts to smother the fire by covering it with soil, recent inspections indicate that the fire may still be smoldering below the surface.

Tire fires typically produce a variety of hazardous compounds including gases, heavy metals, and oil. EPA reports that the average passenger car tire is estimated to produce over two gallons of oil when burned. Tire fires also produce volatile organic compounds such as benzene, ethylbenzene, toluene, and xylene; polynuclear aromatic compounds such as anthracene, benzo(a)anthracene, benzo(a)pyrene, chrysene, fluoranthene, naphthalene, and phenanthrene; and metals such as arsenic, cadmium, lead, and nickel. Many of these substances can easily migrate into groundwater where they can have serious health impacts if consumed.

“Regular drinking water testing indicates that Socorro’s current water supply is safe,” said Secretary Curry. “However, the potential future danger posed by these contaminants warrants immediate action.”

Southwest Tire is no longer in business. To date, the former operators of the facility have been unwilling to install any groundwater monitoring wells, asserting that they do not have the financial resources to do so.

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Southwest Tire PR

March 18, 2005

Page 2

The drilling of these wells will be paid for out of NMED's Hazardous Waste Emergency Fund. This fund contains fines collected from violators of New Mexico's hazardous waste regulations. Its purpose is to fund emergency investigations and clean ups of hazardous substance spills. In recent years this fund has been primarily used to clean up illegal drug labs around the state of New Mexico. It was also utilized in 2000 to clean up hazardous conditions in Los Alamos following the Cerro Grande fire.

Southwest Tire Processors facility is approximately 5.9 acres in size and is located at 1001 Grefco Road in Socorro.

In February 2003 NMED issued a compliance order to Southwest Tire Processors seeking \$683,190 in penalties for numerous violations of the state Solid Waste Act. These included violations of maximum tire storage limits, tire piles that were larger and more closely spaced than those allowed by its permit, and unsafe storage of used oil. The compliance order also requires Southwest Tire to conduct an investigation of environmental contamination at the facility. Settlement negotiations concerning this order are ongoing.

For further information contact Jon Goldstein, Communications Director, NMED at (505) 827-0314.

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